

Herman Melville

Art

In placid hours well pleased we dream
Of many a brave unbodied scheme.
But form to lend, pulsed life create,
What unlike things must meet and mate:
A flame to melt...a wind to freeze;
Sad patience...joyous energies;
Humility...yet pride and scorn;
Instinct and study; love and hate;
Audacity...reverence. These must mate
And fuse with Jacob's mystic heart,
To wrestle with the angel...Art.

On February 11 2002 Olivier Braet and Rita De Vuyst visited Steve Lacy at his home in Paris. A literal transcription of that conversation follows.

Olivier: I just brought one book, this is one of my favorite books, it's the *Letters of William Burroughs* with letters that he wrote to Gysin, Ginsberg and Kerouac.

S: I read most of those letters of William Burroughs. I don't have that particular book, but I read a lot of them. Burroughs said that Gysin was the only man he respected.

O: He loved Ginsberg.

S: Sure he loved Ginsberg, yeah, he loved a lot of people but he really respected Gysin.

O: Exactly. Did you know that the first time Gysin is mentioned, Burroughs calls him a "paranoid bitch on wheels"?

S: Oh yeah? (Laughs)

O: It's typical for paranoid Burroughs just to say that. But later on he started respecting him.

S: They both knew quite a bit about paranoia, but I think that Brion had mastered his, whereas Burroughs was fighting his all his life actually.

O: He always remained very suspicious and had a lot of conspiracy theories.

S: And with good reason, too. Some of it is very true! (Laughs)

O: I just wanted to quote one thing, a typical Burroughsian rant, about his relationship with his publisher. This was after he published *Junky*, and was working on *Queer*. The publisher didn't quite like the *Queer* title. He wanted to call the second part *Fag*. And Burroughs goes into this hilarious rant in a letter to Ginsberg.

Now look, you tell Carl Solomon I don't mind being called queer. T.E. Lawrence and all manner of right Joes was queer. But I'll see him castrated before I'll be called a fag. (HE WANTS TO CALL PART II FAG. IMAGINE!) That's just what I been trying to put down uh I mean *over*, is the distinction between us strong, manly, noble types and the leaping, jumping, window dressing cocksucker. Furthechrissakes a girl's gotta draw the line somewheres or publishers will swarm all over her sticking their nasty old biographical prefaces up her ass (The Letters of William S. Burroughs – 1945 to 1959: p. 119: Letter to Ginsberg on 22/4/1952).

S: [laughing] Yeah he was so funny. Wow.

O: Concerning your relationship with publishers. You constantly have to propose to recording companies. And the executives of those companies are tied to their marketing and production budgets. The specific aesthetic categories that are stuck in their minds and the labels they use for your music is why they probably sometimes refuse to publish your music. What I'm getting at is the perverse effect of categorial thinking, the fact of being confronted with a public and executives at record companies who're stuck with certain categories. What are your experiences with that?

S: Well, it's a life long struggle. And a damn long struggle, and it continues to be something between a sport and a war. I made a lot of records. I think most of them I arranged myself. In other words, I went after them. I wanted to do this record or this record and I went after companies to be allowed to do them, get paid for it and let have it come out, you know, do the whole thing. It's very seldom that a record company comes knocking at my door. Very seldom. It has happened and some important times it was the other way around and they came after me. It's like bipolar. It's always: "They're the other side". They're the enemy in a way. Sometimes you have a good relationship with a producer but it's really rare. It's usually like that: head to head, eyeball to eyeball. Because they're coming from a different point. It's my experience also, and very much so at the beginning, when a producer wouldn't even listen to the record I made. He didn't care at that point. And it hurt my feelings. I was so stupid, I thought "gee, the producer don't even wanna hear what I did". But later I realized that it was unimportant that he heard what I did, really. That wasn't the point. The point is that he should do well and he should get his money.

Sometimes we collaborate, we work together, we can do miracles together sometimes, and sometimes there's a really good 'rapport'. For example I have a good rapport now with Daniel Richard from Verve. We just did *The Beat Suite*. This is a hell of a venture that we did. The Beat Suite is ten beat poets set to jazz with a quintet of Irene singing all 10 pieces. It's been done in December, it's been mixed. It's gonna come out in April. Now this is against all odds, really. That they make so much money with certain artists that sometimes they can afford to do something with people like me.

O: On the side

S: On the side. Even though it doesn't make them lose money.

O: A prestige thing.

S: It's prestige. Richard likes what I do, he's a fan, you know. I've known him for a long, long time. The record should do well enough so that it's justifiable. That they sell fifteen, twenty thousand over a few years and all that. This record contains the whole lit-jazz thing. It has Kaufman, Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs ...

O: Gysin?

S: No Brion Gysin, although the whole record is dedicated to him. There's Rexroth and Lew Welch, and Waldman.

O: Important that you mention Irene. You have composed very often based on a text, and Irene has very often sung these texts on your music. It's seems amazing almost that jazz journalists have given so few attention to the dialogue between you and Irene.

S: You know why? Because it hits their weak side. Most of them don't know beans of literature, poetry, the beat poets, none of this stuff. They're very channeled thinkers of jazz. They may know Louis Armstrong and Dexter Gordon and all that, but they don't know even Dostoyevsky or Van Gogh or Beethoven or none of that stuff. A lot of them. Not all of them. Bill Shoemaker's very intelligent. And the guy in Chicago John Corbett knows quite a few things. Also Art Lange, Peter Kostakis and a few others are the few people that are 'up on it'. But a lot of the producers, when you say the word poetry, they panic. And the critics, you know. First of all, they can't pick on me, so they pick on Irene. They've been doing that for twenty, thirty years now.

O: You wrote an angry letter to Downbeat on this matter.

S: Yeah, I got tired of them picking on her, you know. It was stupid. Because they can't pick on me, see, they pick on her. It's stupid because if they realize what she does and how great she is. I think with the new record they're gonna eat their words. This one. Before, she came out with like two pieces on the records, and the critics said: "She's a major distraction". Well, what can they say now? She's on all ten tracks. And the words are fantastic. The Corso and the Ginsberg, they're beautiful. The lyrics are really high quality. So I'm very curious to see what this record will do.

O: They can't walk around this one.

S: They can't. It's gonna hit them. But ... we'll see. I'm a little bit weary because very often before I made a certain record I said: "Oh boy ... oh boy ... If this one comes out it's gonna open all the doors and people are gonna blablabla", and it didn't happen, never happened. (Laughs) So, you know, something can go wrong. The company can go out of business. Who knows?

O: I'm not going to ask anything personal about you and Irene, of course. We're talking about the literature, you, and Irene.

S: Literature was one of the things that brought us together. She was in San Francisco in the early sixties, before I knew her. She knew Jack Spicer. She knew Lew Welch. She knew some of the poets. She was just a young girl with a guitar. She was out there, and some of that stuff she introduced to me. And a lot of it I showed her. And together we explored that area of writing. Anne Waldman is an old friend of mine, an old member of my family, really. And I knew Ginsberg from the fifties too. Burroughs I knew very well, all of them. So, there's an organic reason for all that. This project, *The Beat Suite*, is an organic project that took years to mature, develop and all that, and finally came together and here it is: recorded.

But ... we'll see what happens. It would be nice to perform that stuff in public. We did a few gigs like that, and we recorded it, and that's it.

But in the meantime I'm going to college, and George is teaching in another college ... and it's hard to perform and survive, you know. Especially when you do stuff like that. It's unheard off to have a jazz record to come out with ten vocal pieces and a lot of improvisation.

O: That brings us in a way to some of the techniques the Beats used. Contrasting and putting together of unsuspected elements as in the collage technique and the cut-up technique of Gysin, later adopted by Burroughs.

S: That's what I've never used myself.

O: You haven't.

S: No. I've never used that. I know about it and I've enjoyed the results of that and I've even recommended it to other people. Actually, Mikhail, the violinist was here yesterday and we were talking about that. He's improvising for the first time in his life, really, with me. And he enjoys it very much. He has such a (sic.) knowledge of classical music. He knows hundreds of things, so he has all that what we call baggage, and he's trying to create his own language, improvising language. And he came to the conclusion that if you just take a little bit of this and a little bit of that and a little bit of this, he comes out at his own language, and I said to him: "That's cut-up technique!" And he never heard that before. I said: "That's the cut-up. That's a literary technique they used it in the fifties, and you just find it for your own playing", you know. And that was true, see. Now he, he's using that cut-up technique. I never needed that. My stuff was organic, from a long, long time ago, and I don't need to cut myself up.

O: So you don't use the technique, but you find writers who use it fascinating.

S: Oh yeah.

O: Not only Gysin used it.

S: John Cage used it in a way. John Cage did a lot of snipping, that's for sure. And Paul Klee also. He'd choose pictures and cut them up and put names to them, and all that, you know.

O: Even Cézanne's landscapes are in a way a combination of multiple perspectives.

S: Yeah. Optical. Well now, optics is one of my fundamental tools. I would say that most of what I do in music, and the way I found various things and the way I work, is through optics. You know, magnifying certain things and isolating certain things. They're optical phenomena, they're ways of focusing. And certain elements in the music and certain elements in literature, and all that. In speech. And it's a way of ... well ... it's a focus. I think focus is a very, very important concept in my own work.

O: You also dedicated an album to Braque.

S: Oh yeah. Actually we're doing a workshop down in Orleans in the art school this month, for a week, with non-musicians. Young students, art students. And we're gonna do the Braque piece. We're gonna have the students painting them and we're gonna discuss all those little aphorisms. That's very interesting. You know that Braque book?

O: I've never read it, never even held it.

S: It's a small book full of wisdoms for artists. Now that was an interesting work. *Tips*. See, that is a work that's been out of print for years. That's one of the arguments we have with the producers. The records go out of print, they don't have a chance.

O: Here's Burroughs talking about Gysin's paintings.

He regards his paintings as a hole in the texture of so-called “reality”, through which he is exploring an actual place existing in outer space. That is, he moves into the painting and through it, his life and sanity at stake when he paints. (The Letters of William S. Burroughs – 1945 to 1959: p. 398: Letter to Ginsberg on 10/10/1958).

O: That’s a very action-oriented way of making art.

S: Stepping into it, and backing in and out, sure. This is an early picture of his. (Lacy points to a painting in his living room.)

O: This is a Gysin?

S: Yeah, of Morocco. I have some others above, but they’re up in the “grainier”, or the attic.

[...]

O: Let’s talk again about categories.

S: How horrible. The trouble with France is that there’s too many departments. And even in the music and theatre, it’s just departments all the time. It’s really very hard because what we do, it’s here and there and there and there. It’s in literature, it’s on contemporary music, it’s in jazz, it’s part of the theatre, it’s ... you know, structures ... language, you know.

O: And you confuse people with that.

S: I normally have to work at jazz clubs, jazz festivals, jazz record companies, etcetera. And I love jazz. All that I do is jazz. I don’t deny my jazz. But that department stuff, departmental stuff has really been a life long struggle. Nah it’s not finished yet. There are things we’ve been trying to record for years and years and we haven’t been able to. Like *Treize regards*, a Tsvetayeva cycle. It’s been twelve years I’ve been trying to get that recorded.

O: Now we’re touching something that can go very far in a discussion. A lot of innovative music is typified by that fact that the public doesn’t yet own the artistic categories with which they can situate the music, appreciate it, and accept this new form of artistic expression. So these categories are everywhere, even in appreciation, not only of the executives, but also of the public at large. And the other way around, even musicians. For example, you spoke about the distinction between offensive and defensive jazz. And you said that both forms can be fertile. “When well played they are both at the brink”.

S: Well sure, jazz itself is like out there.

O: And I’ve been thinking that ... could it be that the highest sensation of freedom could be attained when you’re playing defensive music? In that you don’t have to ... the rules of the music are so internalized and you’re so used to them that you can freewheel and you don’t have to think at all while playing it. While your music doesn’t strike me as freewheeling, defensive at all.

S: No. I’ve always taken chances and always playing beyond my control, a little bit. I mean I’m going faster than I should sometimes. Like driving a car. It’s very much like driving. But

what you said of the defensive, or the traditional, you know it depends on the quality, man. I don't care about anything except quality. I mean if I hear like a Harry Edison playing the trumpet, or somebody like that, who is an absolute master. And what you play could be considered like old-fashioned, traditional, or defensive, it's just not true. It's just not true. You see the quality is so high that that puts it in a category by itself. Which is much more important than those other categories. Defensive, offensive, that don't mean shit. I said that, you know that's a cute thing to say for a moment, but it's not a real distinction. I was just trying ... I was just sort of bragging because my music was more modern than theirs. I wouldn't take that too seriously, really. It was just to fill a space, in a way. It's true what I say, but it's just not that interesting. Like Harry Edison is, or somebody older, older, like Benny Carter. What about Benny Carter, really, you know. Is that defensive or offensive? I mean it's high quality; it's such high quality that you wouldn't demean it by giving it a qualification like that?

O: You do give the impression of looking down on the, for example, the neo-bop.

S: Well, you know, if it's boring it's boring and there's a lot of re-creative stuff going on. And recreation, jazz recreation just doesn't excite me. I mean I find it very uninteresting, and actually much jazz that I hear, really, is sort of just without interest to me, at this point. Cause I've heard that before. I wanna hear something I've never heard before. And that's the point. Even if I play myself I wanna hear something I haven't heard before. It's not that I play what I've already played, I wanna hear something new.

O: OK. Let's really get into the writers now. First I wrote down here "The Russian Connection". You do have a Russian connection. For example the one record you would take with you on a deserted island, you once said in an interview, was *Le Sacre du Printemps* from Stravinsky.

S: It's gotta be a good performance though.

O: What performance would that be?

S: Well, the best one I've ever heard was a Russian Orchestra. The first time that it came out of Russia, I think it was in the seventies or the eighties, I really can't recall. It was a Russian Orchestra. For me it was a revelation. I've never heard it play like that, with those Russian rhythms really strong. And I don't know who the conductor was; but it was like the first recordings of that from the Soviet Union. But aside from that I like several or different performances. I don't know. I'd have to compare them just before leaving to the desert island.

O: He conducted it himself also.

S: Well yeah. A wonderful performance, yeah.

O: I like the Leonard Bernstein, amazingly enough.

S: Well, I saw him do that, man. It was hilarious. I mean, he jumped up and down like a red Indian. You know he was like "Ooh! Ooh! Ooh!" It was so funny. We were up at the balcony; I was laughing my head off, really. But, you know the musicians respected him. He did a great performance, and in a way if you didn't look. You shouldn't look. So, yeah, he was great man. He was funny though.

O: It was a good performance, that I remember.

S: He's very good, yeah. Boulez is quite good too, you know.

O: Well ... I'm a big Bartok fan, and ow no no. Boulez also does Bartok, nah no not. But that's personal.

S: He was a difficult person, Boulez.

O: I like Bartok conducted by Georg Solti, for example.

S: Aha, yeah. Very good, yeah. Hungarian.

O: You're working on a cycle on Zamyàtin?

S: No. I'm not working on a cycle by him, but he's one of my literary heroes. But I've never done anything with the words of his because it's a novel, you know. It would make a great opera. *We*, it's a book called *We*. It's one of my favorite books; I've read it many times. I recommend it to a whole lot of people. I think it's a masterpiece.

Rita: It's hard to find.

S: Really? It used to be easier to find. It's a magnificent book. Really brilliant. To think that he wrote that in the twenties. He saw the whole thing coming. All that what's happening now. He saw that back then, it's amazing.

O: I gave you the little short introduction on Mikhael Bakhtin. [A Russian cultural philosopher from the 1920's.]

S: I had a little difficulty because those terms that he uses, they're meaningless to me. And you know, like, we who are in this music are so much closer to this stuff that for us ... He used terms like, it's unthinkable. But you could imagine a baker in a boulangerie, and he's dealing with the stuff, he's making bread, you know. What kind of words you think he would use to talk about that?

O: He would say: "Gimme thàt, or gimme this and that."

S: Yeah. Pass that shit over here, or this stuff over here. He wouldn't use terms like those Bakhtin terms; they would be absolutely meaningless to him. And that's the way I feel about it, you know. I don't need that kind of elucidation, and that kind of, you know, that kind of distance. That's an anathema for me, you know. I run away from that. Adorno, Bakhtin, all those eh ... No baby, not for me. Not my, not my eh cup, it's not my thing. It doesn't help me. It makes it harder.

O: Yeah. It's too abstract.

S: Yeah it's too abstract. There's a bunch of people like that around, you know. Barthes, Derrida, all these people.

O: Bourdieu died the day before your date with Waldron and Avenel at Le Duc de Lombard.

S: Yeah. We bought a book of his. Absolutely unreadable for me. Both Irene and I agree that it's even more difficult than Lacan, which we also tried. You know there's a level ... you've got to find your level. In language, in wine, in living, the altitude, music, clothing, you have to find your own level. And you have to live within your level. You can't stick your head up there and try to live like that, it's impossible. It hurts your neck. So I can't handle those. You know I can handle all this stuff here, but I can't handle a whole lot of other stuff. You know. There's a lot of poetry that's out of my ken, it's beyond of my depth. A lot of French I can't handle, music I can't handle, food, you know. You have limits.

O: But you have bought a book of Bourdieu? A French book?

S: Yeah, the other day we bought one, yeah.

O: I can imagine it's eh ...

S: I couldn't. Not even one sentence made sense to me. It may be great, it may be wonderful, it may be useful but I, it's not for me. Gregory Corso I understand. That I can get. Burroughs I understand perfectly. Brion Gysin. Have you seen the Brion Gysin reader that just came out?

O: I've seen it yeah. I haven't bought it yet.

S: He was brilliant. He was really a genius. I mean, he could really write. And he could really paint. And he could really perform. I mean, he did so many things. With photography he was sensational.

O: And people couldn't believe that he did all that.

S: People didn't believe that the one person could do all that, that well. I mean there was Burroughs who believed it, but a lot of people didn't believe it.

O: They thought that could not be serious, while Gysin was above all that. He was very serious.

S: He knew what he was doing. He really knew what he was doing. And he knew what we were doing. He knew what everybody, you know what Burroughs ... he knew what everybody was doing. He knew what Duke Ellington was doing. He knew what Broadway was about. He knew, I mean, so many things. And plus he knew history, he knew languages, he knew painting. And he appreciated dance, and theatre, everything. Really, he was really the most well cultivated person I've ever met.

O: You have been situated in the "free jazz" movement, or Free Improvisation movement, especially in the seventies.

S: In the sixties really. The sixties is when that happened. The sixties was when it happened to anybody who was influential in that movement. Some people were already there in sixty. Some people didn't get there until sixty-eight. But in the seventies that was done. That was really done. That's why I came to Paris because that was done and it was time to begin reaping the harvest of what we had discovered in the sixties. I mean we went through the fire,

and we came out of that fire with new perceptions. Then it was time to do something with those things. And that's why we came to Paris and we started to do that here. I mean in Rome, we were two years in Rome Irene and I, sixty-eight sixty-nine, and it was a very important time of research. We did certain things and all that, but it really began when we came to Paris.

O: That's when you met Beltrametti?

S: I knew him from Rome. We knew him for a long time, Irene and I've know him for a long time.

O: In his short autobiography he mentioned your friendship, and how much he enjoyed it.

S: He was an important friend and collaborator.

O: And he also went to Japan.

S: Yeah. The Japanese thing is very important for a lot of us. That's true.

O: To go over your European years. When you came to Paris, you said it took you five to ten years to crack the city.

S: Well, we had to survive right away; we couldn't wait ten years, so. We were at a level at that time; everybody was on the same level. There was a lot of musicians in Paris in the early seventies from all over the world, and the free thing was very alive. And prices were down. You know we stayed in hotels, like you stayed in a hotel full of musicians and the rooms cost at that time I think twenty francs a day. Which was a lot of money for us, at that time. We were ... we were ... we had no money at all. But we worked all over Paris. We worked in schools, museums, theatres, libraries, ...

O: Prisons.

S: Prisons, hospitals, outdoors, for the radio, everything, you know. At a very low level. Very, sometimes very little money. Very little money. But the music flourished. And gradually things got better until by the eighties we were earning enough money that we didn't have to do that. Scrounging around anymore. It was really scratching the seventies, that's why I put that record out, "Scratching the Seventies". Cause it was a scratching period. But all chickens were on the same level. So there were no stars in Paris at that time, in that music. There were people more or less well known, but they weren't local stars. Like there are now, there's a few big stars. Like in those photos. It was a beautiful period then in the seventies, you know.

O: You went to Germany, Holland, ...

S: Germany, Holland, Italy. There used to be a very important radio and television program. I guess it was television, really, or radio. In Germany, Hamburg, called "Free Jazz Workshop". And they invited all kinds of people there to work together and present these on broadcast. And that was very important. That's where I contacted with Mengelberg and Derek Bailey and Han Bennink and all those people. Don Cherry and I were there. And Irene. It was a wonderful opportunity to work and prepare things and present them. Then that producer died though. And that's the end of that.

O: So. Let's talk about ... Let's check my tape ... It's almost finished. But I've got second one. I guess we can take a pause.

S: Do you want a beer?

O: I think I could handle a beer.

S: (To Rita) You want a beer?

[Lacy gets beer – Heineken from a can.]

[Changing of tapes]

S: He's [Cormac McCarthy] a very important writer. He wrote some bestsellers, and they're making movies out of some of them. He writes about Mexico and the West and horses, and cowboys. He's a very important writer. I read a little bit of Ellroy but I think McCarthy is stronger, but it's more ...

O: Epic.

S: Epic, yeah. And you know. Like Melville. ... Would you like to hear that Burroughs piece?

O: Yeah, I would love to hear it.

S: I'll play you two things.

O: I hope you can one day play it live.

S: Yeah, but not with the group though like this. I'll play you Kerouac and Burroughs.

O: Yeah, OK.

[Music ...
Thermodynamics has won at a crawl ...
Orgone balked at the post ...
Christ bled ...
Time ran out ...]

S: Well, that gives you a little idea.

[Olivier's curious about Bourdieu's book on male domination Steve bought.]

S: I only read what I wanna read. I won't read what won't go down. It's like trying to eat food that you don't like – it won't go down. I think George Lewis spoke to me about Bakhtin. He knows him. George told me he found it very interesting. George is more into that kind of thing than I am. George also reads Adorno and Barthes and all those things. I can't read any of that stuff. But Zamyatin is more important. Zamyatin is not difficult at all. It's simple. It's so simple. The level of the language is very simple. It's very pure. It's very rich. And very evocative. And very funny. But it's a small book. You haven't found it? You'll find it. But he's

not difficult at all. He had to leave Russia. They wanted to kill him. He got permission to leave. Then he died in London.

O: I see here in your library a book of Michaux. He was one of my first favorites.

S: That was one of the things that attracted me before I even came to France. You know in New York, back in the fifties I discovered like the French cinema, some French music and French literature, poetry and things like that. And some of those were the things that attracted me, even before I came here. Also I did study a little bit of French in high school. But I didn't get very far with it, no. You know, Michaux and Genet and Sartre, some of the poets like Appolinaire, I knew those things before I even came here.

O: Jean Genet is a good example of somebody who wrote in a classical style. He wanted to write beautiful. That's completely different from the harsh style of Burroughs, although Genet and Burroughs were soul brothers.

S: Again it's the quality that kinds. I like very much Céline. And even before I came here I was mad about Céline. A lot of people were, you know. And of course in translation, in English those things, of course.

O: He was put in jail in Denmark after the second World War. He had been "wrong" on certain things. And the only thing he asked for from his brother was coffee. "I need coffee. The writer's gold" he said.

S: [Laughing] I'm sure he needed cigarettes too. Coffee and cigarettes, both.

O: Coffee and cigarettes. That's a combination!

O: You have worked all these years on the cycle about the Te-Tao Ching.

S: I worked on that for many years. I discovered that in the late fifties. I thought about it for many years until I met Irene. I tried to do something with it, but when I met Irene. And by sixty-six, no, by sixty-seven I had set the first one. And then I worked on them for the rest of the sixties and the early seventies until they were quite formed. So I started to play them and record them. First without the words. The first time we recorded it was without the words. In fact the record's called "Wordless". Yeah, I think I have it upstairs. The very first version of that is a recording of seventy-one, with the quintet but without words, so it's called Wordless. And then by the end of the seventies they had been recorded with the words. So they took many years of elaborating, trying out, changing things and all that stuff. And then, we didn't touch them after that, except "Bone". We continued to do that for many years.

O: That's my favorite one, actually!

S: But the rest of the cycle got put away, except as a solo thing for me. I still play the Tao as a solo piece. [Steve pronounces solo distinctly as "soul"] and I used it also for films, I used it for many many different things. And I also used it with students a little bit, sometimes. I had a student today and I gave him "Existence", because it's octave, it's a good octave exercise. So I gave him that as an octave exercise. I hope in Boston to really use a lot of that music for students.

O: There's a thing that fascinates me about Taoism and Buddhism.

S: Yeah ... Buddhism ... I used that also.

O: There's this thing with all of the black jazz musicians, they have this thing where a lot of them are very religious. Coltrane, Ayler, they were very Christian, or they had their own kind of religion.

S: Holy Lord.

O: Now, the European musicians and even writers seem to have this interest in Zen Buddhism and Taoism. And for some people it's just because it's exotic. And they lose themselves in Zen Buddhist exercises. And I always get very nasty reactions from Zen Buddhists whenever I quote Burroughs: "Show me a good Buddhist novelist. When Aldous Huxley got Buddhism, he stopped writing novels and started writing tracts."

Now, what with Taoism?

S: Oh, it's very different, very different. First of all, the Tao is one thing, and Taoism is another thing. And the Tao itself is fragments of what remains from Lao Tzu. Teachings. And there's more practice in there than religion. It's not religious at all. However people came along and made a religion out of that. And that had nothing to do with what it's all about, really. Because what it's about is heaven and earth. There's no god mentioned in the Tao at all. It's really nature and life and people and correct living. There's no religious element in that. But priests came along and made a religion out of that. And to me that's ridiculous. It has nothing to do with it.

Now Zen also is not a religion. Zen is nothing, nothingness. It examines. It's a kind of view, Zen. But it's also an experience very much like jazz, like improvisation. Improvisation and Zen is very, very close. That's why we were all interested in that. Also painting and Zen is very, very close. Zen is close to everything because it's nothing. And nothing is very close to everything. "N'est ce pas"?

The Zen came in, as far as I can remember, back in the fifties, and the sixties. It came in strong through certain books. Mister Cage was into it. It was very important and still is very important to me, in fact a cycle I wrote three years ago is a cycle of Zen, *Songs*, ten of them. And two of them were recorded on a record with Roswell Rudd, *Monk's Dream*. The other eight have never been done, really.

Also, Irene and I are also very much into Trungpa.

O: Rinpoche. He founded the Naropa Institute.

S: We've both been to Naropa. There's a whole conspiracy there. The Buddhist thing is very strong, very important, really.

O: Did you read Burroughs' account on his stay in Naropa? It's very funny.

S: No, I didn't. But I heard the other end, when they told me about his stay. They said he was fun. He was funny and weird, you know. They enjoyed him being there. He was amazing, he kept everybody on their toes. He surprised everybody. I heard some tapes he made there, actually, when he was there. Lectures that he gave, and they were wonderful.

O: Burroughs wasn't allowed to bring his typewriter along, because these were just "distractions", Rinpoche said. Then Burroughs writes: "But distraction is fun. What's wrong with this? I sense an underlying dogma here to which I am not willing to submit. Why not have fun?" And then he writes on all sorts of practical stuff. He writes stuff like: "And some spaced-out Buddhist has put the fire extinguisher behind the Coleman stove. I can see the flames already falling, while I'm trying to reach the fire extinguisher. Put the fire extinguisher somewhere else!" And then he wasn't allowed to kill bugs either. Then of course you strike a sensitive chord with the "exterminator" in him.

S: The Exterminator! Yeah, that's right. And he couldn't bring his gun either too. Poor Burroughs.

O: No, no. And he once saw a centipede. And he grabbed for something to smash it. But it was gone. And he saw that as a small miracle. Because afterwards he realized the climate is too harsh for them to grow any larger.

S: Well, Burroughs was learning to the very end. It was admirable. Because he was humble enough, in his own genius, to still be able to learn and take in certain things. He was a child to the very end, really, you know.

O: I've got a beautiful picture of him, sitting on the front porch of his house, with his shot gun on his lap. And the first thing I had to think of were the words of Joseph Goebbels: "When I hear the word culture, I reach for my gun." I could imagine Burroughs saying the exact words, but him saying it of course reverses the whole thing. 'Cause he shot at his paintings also.

S: Well yeah, that was part of his technique. But Brion had done that before. A lot of what Burroughs did in paintings was a copy of Brion. And so not quite so momentous as when Brion did it. He just started too late, you know. It was more of a hobby for him. It's ironic that his stuff sold like crazy and he [Brion Gysin] couldn't sell anything.

O: Well, that's the hype machine ... I think we should leave it at that. We've been talking for so long.

S: Well. We can do more, if you want. Just a little bit.

[Changing of tapes]

S: We're talking about thirty or forty years of work. Or fifty years of work with the saxophone. So I could go on and on and on, bla bla bla bla bla, for forty years.

O: I know. We're just scratching the surface.

S: Voila, scratching, yeah.

Rita: Music can express a lot of things in a very short time.

S: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's as rich as anything. ... Quotes are like that. You can see one paragraph who can galvanize you for the rest of your life. For the one thing that you see in one paragraph, in one phrase. You never forget it. In music and in painting and in theatre and all that there are lines, there is proportion, there is harmony, you know, there is cadre, there is

space, color, there's intensity. All those things are common to many different artistic endeavors. So there's a unity of all artistic endeavors to me, whether it's painting or theatre or music or dance or cinema. I mean, there's a unity there.

R: Do you visualize? Like Mal visualizes colors?

S: I like to do music that I can see. I can hear it and I can see it. And also there's a lot of paintings that I can eat. You can like taste it. Consume it. There are certain paintings that are so delicious where the surfaces are like Turner, Monet, Kandinsky. With my teeth. You could just "avalier ça", you can eat it you can consume it. You can take it in like a wafer, like the holy wafer. Some of Pollocks things I like. Some of De Koonings. Some of Rembrandt. Some of ... I mean, really great paintings can be consumed, literally. I can like (makes slurping sound) just like (slurp) take it down. And music is like that too. It can really fulfill.

O: Yeah, you can eat music.

S: You can eat music. There were even a movement in painting some time - Eat Art – it was back in the sixties, Eat Art, you know! (Laughs)

O: That sounds very much like the sixties!

Rita: Mal sees colors while playing.

S: I can believe that. He's very sensitive. He knows what he's doing really very well. He is like sculpting. Now would you call that offensive or defensive? It just doesn't make sense. Right now I'm reading ... I'm almost finished with the biography of Nadia Boulanger. Now, she was teaching about music all her life, she was considered the greatest teacher. She was careful about words and she didn't wanna publish her thing, you know. Because she had no faith in bringing to paper. The words as a substitute for music, really.

O: You need to have strong people to be able to put it on paper.

S: There are some people that can put music into words. There's one jazz critic who has this gift. Whitney Balliet [a jazz critic for the New Yorker magazine since 1957]. He's very old now, he's an old man. He wrote for the New Yorker. And he had the gift of being able to describe, in words, some of what's playing. Wonderful.

O: And you can hear the music?

S: You can hear the music. In his words. It's very rare though, that's very rare. He's the only one I know that can do that. He could describe some of these styles in words. You could just hear it. Wonderful.

O: So you have a meeting to go to?

S: Yeah. I have a *rendez vous* to have dinner with a friend of mine and eh, eventually, yeah. I have to call him back. Do you live in Belgium?

O: I live in Ghent.

S: In Ghent, also. Everybody lives in Ghent! Ghent is a hip city, eh? And how did you come here, in a car?

O: No, by train.

S: Oh by train, I see. Are you staying the night?

O: No.

S: Oh. You're going back.

O: Tomorrow I have to work.

S: I have a *rendez vous* soon. I have to meet somebody. But we can meet again, continue that, you know.

O: Yeah, I would like to.

S: How else can I help you? Can I help you in any other way?

O: I'll do my homework, and come back with new questions.

[Cat comes to Olivier]

O: This cat likes being scratched. Burroughs wrote a book called "The Cat Inside".

S: (Laughs) Oh yeah, The Cat Inside, Brion made the ... It's true that the normal edition of that book doesn't have all of the wonderful drawings that Brion did. They're only in the ...

O: It was a limited edition, yeah.

S: Yeah, it was a limited edition, but it's very expensive, I don't have it.

O: No, neither have I.

S: Actually some of those drawings he got from our cat.

O: Yeah he did?

S: Yeah, because he didn't have a cat. He wasn't that much into cats. He could do anything though. But the Brion Gysin reader is very interesting.

O: I'm gonna buy it.

S: Yeah. It's very good. It just came out. I mean, he wrote so well. Did you read *The Process*? You know that is one of the best novels I have ever read. I read it three times. It's so good that it gets better every time you read it. When you read it you can't help of being astonished ... how could this guy write so well. I mean the writing is really so good! But even his very first book about Uncle Tom, you know, the real uncle Tom. It's a master... that was a gem! And it's so well written. He had such good style such craft.

O: And everybody knows him through Burroughs. Because Burroughs, there was a certain romantic spunk or thing about Burroughs. You know, how he accidentally killed his wife and all that.

S: Well Burroughs had the star power, really, which Brion never had really. Brion was more in the distance. Both had great voices. William had a magnificent voice, and so did Brion. Wonderful voices. I was on quite a few different things with him, poetry festivals and things like that. Radio programs, we even did a television show. I met him quite a few times.

O: Here in Paris?

S: Yeah. I've met Burroughs through Brion in the late seventies. And I knew him in the eighties also through Brion and different things. And I saw him a year or so before he died. We were on a French TV show together also.

O: In what year?

S: Phew. I couldn't tell you man. In the eighties, maybe late eighties, I really don't know man. I like very much his late essays also. About the eh ...

O: The Adding Machine.

S: The Adding Machine. Great. Terrific. Very good. Full of ideas.

[End of interview ... Soup is served]

Goethe to Felix Mendelssohn

If witches' broomsticks thus can bound
 Over the solemn score,
Ride on! Through wider fields of sounds,
 Delight us more and more,
As you have done with might and main,
 And soon return to us again.

'Blossoms' – Steve Lacy's Belgian farewell concerts

A personal impression by Rita De Vuyst

'Blossoms' was Steve Lacy's way of saying goodbye to Europe, and consisted of ten different concerts in Belgium. Ten concerts in ten days, all in different places, with different partners and styles, coordinated by Cedric Dhondt. Surrounded by his most loyal fans and friends, Lacy could express himself fully. His music – rich in construction, colour and content – was always adjusted to the moment and the situation.

The first concert was in the 'Sint-Kwintens Kapel' on July 23 2002, Steve's birthday. He played in dialogue with Shiro Daimon, a Japanese dancer who currently lives in France but returns every year to Tokyo to give performances. Shiro is educated in the traditional arts of *Noh* and *Kabuki*, and developed a unique, personal style that he baptized *Buyutai-Do*. He not only dances, but also uses his voice and plays the typical Japanese *Biwa*. Steve's and Shiro's interplay formed a subtle work of art. Their performance had a dreamlike, eerie quality, depicting a ritual emptiness, as if Shiro was summoning lost souls.

The second concert of July 24 took place in Brussels together with Fred Van Hove on the piano. Although the circumstances were not so ideal the quality of their performance was very energetic. The same combative attitude could be witnessed in Steve's concert with bassist Joëlle Léandre of July 28.

Joëlle prefers playing in free counterpoint with Lacy's lines, which gave us both beautifully poetic moments and very offensive moments where Lacy literally blew away the noise of glasses coming from the counter. After the concert, Steve Lacy joined Mal Waldron at his table.

In contrast, the solo concert of July 26 in the 'ZebraPad Workshop' was conducted in an oasis of rest and intimacy. During the first set of the concert, Steve quoted from Monk's repertoire. In the second part he delved deeper in his roots with 'Sands'. He also played the composition 'Art', based on a text from Melville. Before playing 'Resurrection', a moving tune dedicated to the recently murdered drummer Oliver Johnson, he quoted without any irony Jesus Christ: "Follow me and you shall live forever".

On July 27 Steve again played in the 'Sint-Kwintens Kapel' with Mikhail Bezverkhny on violin. Mikhail, who has a classical formation, took the challenge of playing several of Lacy's soloworks. The recording of this concert is, thanks to the professional work by Michael W. Huon, a wonderful document.

Mikhail started of with a beautiful rendition of six studies from Lacy's book *Practitioners*. Then, Steve brought his life's work: the Tao cycle. The cycle consists of six parts: *Existence*, *The Way*, *Bone*, *Name*, *The Breath*, and *Life on its way*. Of the cycle, Lacy played the first three parts. First, *Existence*, is the book of change and possibilities, and symbolizes dawn. *The Way* is the literal translation of 'Tao', and refers to the morning. *Bone* symbolizes vitality and resilience, and refers to the noon.

In the second part of the concert, Steve improvised with Mikhail on several of Steve's themes. First they brought the *Precipitation Suite*, a suite consisting of four parts – *I Feel A Draft* (dedicated to Mal Waldron), *Cloudy*, *Rain* and *Splashed*. Next, Steve and Mikhail played

Cross Purposes, a piece specifically composed by Steve in February of 2002 for violin and soprano saxophone.

The first part of *Cross Purposes* tells about the meeting and the dance. The second part is more prosaic: a story is being told. The theme of the dance is briefly repeated.

The last part is the 'leaving' – played in a more contemplative manner. We hear the whistle of a steamboat. The crowd cheers from the quay, the Old World is left behind and the ship leaves for Boston.

Rita De Vuyst, Summer 2002

STEVE LACY

Leaves... Blossoms

In d'Oude Kapel

St. Kwintensberg 84 - Gent

23/07/02 18 uur lezing door Olivier Broer
21 uur :
Steve Lacy (sopraansax)
Shiro Daimon (japanse dans)
(vrik €12 - adk €14)

25/07/02 21 uur
Novamix met **Marie Anne Standaert**
Jazz-Funk quartet uit Gent - €5

27/07/02 21 uur
Steve Lacy / Mikhail Bezverkhy (viool)
(vrik €12 - adk €14)

info: www.afkikker.be
Voorverkoop:

offhulder (09 233 01 57) • Y&V (res-tine) (09 233 77 33) • fleur (09 221 40 80)

BLOSSOMS

2002

23 july
Duo with Shiro Daimon
at 20.30 H

24 july
FREE
Duo with Fred Vanhove
at 21.00 H

25 july
Solo Steve Lacy
at 20.30 H

27 july
Duo with Michael Bezverkhy
at 20.30 H

28 july
FREE
Duo with Josée Léandre
at 20.30 H

29 july
FREE
Duo with Irène Aebi
at 20.30 H

30 july
Duo with Irène Aebi
at 20.30 H

31 july
Solo Steve Lacy
at 15.00 H

01 august
Duo with Frederic Rzewski
at 20.30 H

23 july
Duke Kessel - Afkikker
Sint Kwintensberg, 85
2000 Gent
INFO: afkikker.gent@compagnet.be

24 july
Café Central
rue Bergell, 14
1000 Brussel
INFO: champaudt@hotmail.com

25 july
Zabraport Workshop
vial de la Pêche, 59c
1000 Molen
INFO: 020 25 84 05 91

27 july
Oude Kapel - Afkikker
Sint Kwintensberg, 85
2000 Gent
INFO: afkikker.gent@compagnet.be

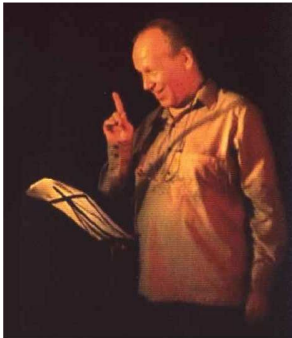
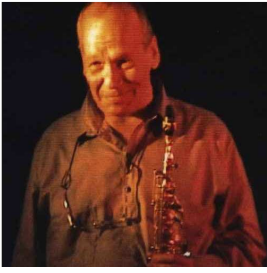
28 july
Café Belg
Twee-Deugde Plein, 14
1000 Brussel
INFO: info@cafebelg.be

29 july
Café Zebra
Place St Gery, 35
1000 Bruxelles
INFO: champaudt@hotmail.com

30 july
Café Heidelberg
Touchehoofdweg, 28
1000 Ixelles
INFO: 020 20 80 35 43

31 july
Musée des Instruments de Musique
rue Montagne de la cour, 2
1000 Bruxelles
INFO: 0032 2 545 01 33

01 august
Théâtre Zuidpool
Lange Noordstraat, 11
2000 Anvers
INFO: 0032 3 213 86 60



Impressions from 'Blossoms' (captured from video): Steve Lacy, Mikhail Bezverkhnny and Shiro Daimon in the Sint-Kwintens Kapel, July 2002 (© Roger Parry)



Joëlle Léandre and Steve Lacy live at the Belga Café (Brussels). Top right: Lacy blows his horn backwards. Bottom right: Lacy exclaims “one more time ...”



Fred Van Hove (© Jackie Lepage)



**Fred Van Hove (on accordion)
and Steve Lacy live in Brussels
(© Rita De Vuyst)**

Epilogue

The long road ...

As I composed this puzzle with the findings and the aid of people I was able to reach, I soon realised that some pieces were missing. So I widened the circle and stretched it to Japan.

On the solo CD “Ten of Dukes” of Steve Lacy, produced by Senators I’ve found the address of the “Egg Farm” near Tokyo where this CD was registered as homage to Duke Ellington. April 7th 2003 I arrived at the Egg Farm, just as the “sakura” (cherry blossoms) were blooming. In Fukaya station, a city 100 km west of Tokyo, Iris Verfaillie, my journey companion, and I were welcomed by the daughter of Mr. And Mrs. Saito, the owners of the Egg Farm. We exchanged our CD’s. I received “Blues For Aida” produced by Space Who (the former Egg Farm) in 1996, and registered during a live concert on the 10th of September 1995. Blues For Aida is a eulogy for Akire Aida, who presented Lacy for the first time in Japon. Blues For Aida was also the opening tune of the “Blossoms” concert in duo with Shiro Daimon, 23.07.02 at the Sint-Kwintenskapel in Ghent. I handed over the CD “The Holy La” (Free Lance FRL-NS 0201). Both CD’s have the same opening tune of Theloniuous Monk, “Shuffle Boil”, and both contain the tune “Retrait” with the words of Thomas Gainsborough. Viewing the concert list of Mrs Saito, who is the driving motor behind the concerts which she started from 1985 at her own house, it felt strange to see that we both invited the same musicians such as Mal Waldron, Joëlle Léandre, Evan Parker and Steve Lacy. It felt even stranger to see that Fred Van Hove (Antwerpen, Belgium) had so many concerts there. So that was a direct indication to put Fred Van Hove ahead of my concert list for the future.

We visited the new concert hall “Egg Farm”, situated next to the old family house. We climbed the stairs of the old family house to the old attic where Steve Lacy’s Sextet performed on the June 3rd 1989. Driving us to our pension, Hotel Kintou Roykan near Fukaya station I showed my gratitude with another gift : “Scratching The Seventies” (Saravah SHL 2082). and a T-shirt which was left from the “Blossoms” Concerts with the lines of Basho:

**As the bell tones fades
Blossom scents take up the ringing
Evening shade.**

Parting we didn’t need any invitation, I said : I come back, Kazuko Saito said: “I come to Ghent. When is the next concert ?”

For those who also want to visit the Egg Farm :

Space Who
Kazuko Saito
140, 1 Kushibiki Okabe-Machi Osato-Gun
Saitan-Ken 369-0212 Japan
E-mail : spacewho@ikn.co.jp

Rita De Vuyst

Robert Creeley

The long road

The long road of it all
Is an echo,
A sound like an image
Expanding, frames growing
One after one in ascending
Or descending order, all
Of us rising, falling
Thought, an explosion
Of emptiness soon forgotten

As a kid I wondered
Where do they go,
My father dead. The place
Had a faded dustiness
Despite the woods and all.
We all grew up.
I see our faces
In old school pictures.
Where are we now?

CD contents: Steve Lacy (ss)

solo @ Afkikker, October 30 2001

Mother Goose

- 1 – 3. Sands
 - a) Stand (7:35)
 - b) Jump (7:50)
 - c) Fall (3:45)
- 4. Naked Lunch (5:20)
- 5. Dead Weight (4:55)
- 6. Mother Goose (5:10)
- 7. Ring of Bone (4:02)
- 8. Traces (5:36)
- 9. Revenue (4:30)

All compositions by Steve Lacy

Recorded by Michael W. Huon,

Studio “Odéon 120 the Right Place”